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departure

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DEPARTURE

VOLUME THREE NUMBER EIGHT

THE COMMERCIAL HERESY

THE MYTH that the arts ought — that is, that they are morally obliged — to pay for themselves in a competitive, commercialised society, is only too healthy. Not even all those actively engaged in the arts would deny it. And certainly very few public figures would risk their reputations by attacking it. The implications of such an attack would be only too obvious. It would assume (some would say impudently) that the arts were worth encouraging. It would suggest (an unbearable thought for certain minds and interests) that the arts should receive special treatment to protect them from the competition of other entertainments. And it would appear to propose (most terrible of all) that the arts should be aided by larger grants from public funds.

Yet can anyone seriously question the need for such assistance? The conclusion to be drawn from the present situation, where the 'success' in a commercial sense of any new, original, and unassisted venture in the arts is almost impossible, is not the hasty one that the arts are mediocre or unenterprising. It is simply that too little is being done to encourage their survival in a society in which they are, by their nature, ill-fitted to compete. The radical difference in aim and character between the commercial world and that of the arts needs to be frankly admitted. It must be established that original work need not be required, indeed should not expect, to be a commercial success (so that a brilliant play which runs for only a few weeks in a London theatre should not be stigmatised beyond revival). And it ought to be recognised that, as has been well remarked, the concept of 'standards of living' applies to the extent and quality of a society's appreciation of the arts just as much as it does to food, medicine, and drains.

Only with a fundamental change of heart could a much more sensible and fruitful arrangement between Mammon and the arts become possible. For only when the assistance of the arts by the state or by commercial concerns is regarded as a pleasant duty (but a duty, nevertheless) rather than a reluctant necessity (and one usually ignored) will there develop the atmosphere in which non-commercial art can prosper. But a mere glance at some of the uses to which our national income is at present put should be enough to convince any reasonable person, whatever his political leanings, that the arts need not beg this belated help with any trace of shame or apology.

C. A. TRYPANIS

Argos

> The dog lay on the dung-heap . . . when he saw Odysseus he wagged his tail . . . and death immediately seized him.
>
> *Odyssey XVII.* 295 *ff.*

The sense you are useful, true to your duty,
Will keep you alive. You may be doing nothing,
Of-course, but keep going, if only you feel that you are.

Argos was old, unkempt, more dung upon the dung-heap
In the yard, one that watched and waited for his master,
Waited and watched. Things had changed. The suitors
Lolled in insolence before his puzzled eyes,
The house-maids giggled obscenely, Penelope
Always bent over a loom. Still he watched,
Waited for his master to change the guard.
What did it matter that he could never have helped
An inch, that nobody noticed, feared him? He watched,
Waited in his truth, until the unknown beggar came,
And with a faint wag of the tail
Gave up his watch, his life.

DENNIS KEENE

A Mask for Teresa

Seeing your smile I seek a relevant sorrow,
Pry past the moment's mask to seize a part
Of what once was; or, dual-deceiver, borrow
Alien lies to fabricate a heart.

When the mask falls your naked face
Implores a safe oblivion, for the light
Burns out the comfortable dark in every private place.

But bless the sunrise and deny the night;
Awake to sing of the one holiest hour,
The solitary dance on a green sea-shore.

The sun ascends: I watch the moment flower;
Fold in still hands the fruit that once it bore. . . .

Then crush the paper flower; in failure ask,
Fearing your smile, protection of a mask.

DONALD DAVIE

*Rejoinder to Martin Seymour-Smith**

You may be right: 'How can I dare to feel?'
May be the only question I can pose,
'And haply by abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural man'
My sole resource. And I do not suppose
That others may not have a better plan.

And yet I'll quote again, and gloss it too
(You know by now my *esprit de collage*):
Donne could be daring, but he never knew,
When he inquired, 'Who's injured by my love?'
Love's radio-active fall-out on a large
Expanse around the point it bursts above.

Alas, alas, who's injured by my love?'
And recent history answers: Half Japan!
Not love, but hate? Well, both are versions of
The feeling that you dare me to. Be dumb!
Appear concerned only to make it scan!
How dare we now be anything but numb?

**A reply to Mr. Seymour-Smith's remarks in his article on 'The Literary Situation' in the last number of Departure.*

ADRIAN MITCHELL

The Death of Crusoe

Always the seagulls cry on me
Weak from the waves. They tell me tales,
Say: ' Now you breathe the English sky;
You have been rescued from the toils
Of the black island.' All the day
They speak fair times. But constantly
Caged in my chest a huge fowl wails
And screams the truth above the lie:
England is drowned. Old age despoils
My senses. I am cast away.

My body is a breathing weight
Obscenely formed to be my shame.
I cannot show it to the light
But hide it in my hollow room;
For now the rooted traps are set,
The springs are sour and my estate
Is lost to me. I have no name.
Thick grow the poison weeds, no flight
Is possible. The branches loom
Shining above with lazy sweat.

Fruit hangs and drops upon the hut
Endlessly from heavy trees.
I have no will to hook or net
Fantastic fish I used to prize.
Shuddering skies melt in the heat
To soak my limbs. My heart is shut
And locked to hope. My silly knees
Kissing the earth, let me forget
The ghosts who turn before my eyes,
Companions of sea and street.

We would go, swaggering and fine
To rake the taverns of a port.
My storming friends, we loved in vain
For now your eyes are all put out.
Shackled along the rusted chains
Of thought, you are not truly mine.
Captives, but you will not be taught
To sing, or move, or speak again.

Bad air invades me from without.
My friends lie sullen in my brains.

Crusoe? I am some other thing,
A city caught in evil days
Of plague and fire; I am a throng
Of shaking men; I am a race
Undone by fear, for I was born
In a cursed country. Who is King?
Who is the ruler of this shattered place,
Myself? The Bible God? But strong
Crusoe is dead. I have no face;
An old mad god, my powers gone.

PETER FERGUSON

Conquest

Can I be a lion to stalk the spring
and close it in my prison paw,
meaning to kill a moving thing
too big for any bestial maw?

Can I be a king, in tyrant's mask,
and order nature to my will,
not seeing how serried spears of grass,
a green rebellion, storm the hill?

Can I be God, by all confessed
in empty skies eternal lord,
knowing that heedless plants infest
the naked earth that is my word?

Or shall I own that with each leaf,
each year I die into the earth,
lion, king, God, too high for grief,
denied one power, of second birth?

LAWRENCE LIPTON

Bal Masqué

> Do you not know that there comes a midnight hour when everyone has to throw off his mask? Do you believe that life will always let itself be mocked? Do you think you can slip away a little before midnight?
>
> *Kierkegaard*

This room is too small for my wings

If the walls should fall back
to the farthest horizon

If the rafters should rise
to the stars

And the great cluster of Hercules
hang suspended like a chandelier

With condors volplaning
under the ceiling?

I should be amused
but it would not be enough

If the rose gold flowers in the panels
should burst into living bloom
and smother us with perfume

If the sea should rise
under our dancing feet
and the naked bodies of women
glow blue with the electric light
of fabulous fishes

If the bored waiter should bow
and set before us the canopic jar
containing the viscera of the Twelfth Ramses?

I should think it droll
but it would not be enough

Nothing is ever enough
This is the precious malady we nourish
Promethean, each on his rock

This is also the omphalos of art
Never let a wound heal.

SESSION

by Frederick Woods

AROUND midnight the music hotted up. Hank hung over the drums in a dream, Larry arched backwards under his horn, eyes closed, elbows jammed into his ribs, looking like a junkie under the spell. And Ray leant against the piano, fingering casual tumbling notes from the alto slung at his chest. He gazed out into the crowd in front of the low dais and slipped off a lazy break that brought ' oh-oh-oh ' from their throats. Behind them, couples spun loose-kneed and sweating, and the skirts swirled up and wrapped around the thighs of the boys whose feet never moved a pace from the same spot but were never still.

Funny kids, thought Ray as he rested, half-listening to the bass thudding behind him. As soon as they come down the stairs, nothing gets through to them except us, me and my boys. Nothing gets through but the beat and the noise. That's all they want from us. Noise and a strong beat. One to drown the monotony of their lives, the beat to keep them moving so's memory can't creep up on them. And so they dance and laugh and sweat and no-one watches them. But the cats out front, they're different. They can criticise your phrasing, your fingering, your integration. They can shout ' oh-oh ' or ' no-no ' and you follow their orders or go bust. They can tear you apart like lions. They can vote you into money and fame too, and that's where they're dangerous. But give one a sax and he's lost. Musical eunuchs, know all about it but can't do it themselves. His stomach muscles tightened as Hank doubled up the rhythm and he sucked his mouthpiece ; caught Larry's eye, nodded, and they swung into the final unison passage, finishing on a bare fifth which brought screams of ' no-no-no ' from the audience. From the back of the room someone booed, and a hail of catcalls showered on the group.

They didn't like it, thought Ray, Christ, they didn't like it. The first step down and then the long slide. Right the way down. Past the back rooms of pubs, past the small-time hops, down the steep, steep ramp without stopping, all the way to the gutter. And then the hat, the battered sax with an old, old reed, squeaking six-month-old songs that no one heard. All the long way down. All of it. No more cleverness, no more counterpoint. They want noise. Give them noise. Play what they want ; it's the only way. Give the sods what they like and to hell with integrity. Integrity? What's that? Blindness, stubbornness. Something I can't afford. Something me and the boys can't use. Not at a moment like this. All right, you punks, we'll give you what you want, we'll play down to you. He pulled the group into a torrent of cacophony, overblowing on his alto till it squeaked and screamed. Larry was taking his horn high, high as Dizzy ; up, up, higher still, till the shrill stream of chromaticism had him dazed with its force. Larry was rolling like a tired fighter, bending and arching, Hank hammered the hi-hat and tenor till he was blind with sweat. We're there, thought Ray, we've done it. They're roaring, shouting, threshing, but they can't beat us. They can't drown us. He leant the mike into the guts of the open upright, and let Louie come in with the heavy, sharp chords off-rhythm, till they didn't know, any of them, who was playing, who was listening, but they were all playing and all listening, and Larry came in high up in triplets, catching them by the throat and holding them with sweet bitterness, his notes silver and hard, cleanly coming, and high again, Ray taking his note and Larry cutting out, so that the change-over was impeccable. The crowd was gone, its noise the sea's noise or a waterfall, coming to it round the side of a hill, rising and retreating, and he was alone on the hill, blasting and challenging the sky with his lasciviously-toned sax till the sky opened and there was nothing beyond, and the challenge turned to praise, ecstatic, believing, strong. The notes kept coming and the inspiration flowed in Ray like blood, essential. The passion rushed out of him, and then Larry and Louie and Hank were up there with him, all on the hilltop, all praising, and there was nothing beyond nothing, and again nothing. There was rushing wind in his ears, waves on sand, thunder, and the voice of the world in space. The hillside darkened and split, a negro stumbled up the slope, tears on his face. His pink palms rattled on tight drum skins, giving an edge to the deeper tenor. He swayed like a snake. The bass crashed to the ground and Dix's voice called to the soul wildly, extemporising mad parabolas of sound. Larry hit G in altissimo and held it, a screaming fury, and then shaking on it till the hilltop crumbled and the sky came together and they were back in the room with the lights and the crowd and the heat.

There was stillness in the small room. Larry flopped in a chair, swabbing his face and neck, and Hank sat back relaxing. Ray wiped

the running sweat from his eyes and looked at the audience. They were huddled together, silent, subdued. There was no cheering, no applause, just a gentle murmur as their breath escaped. They stared at Ray as though hypnotised, and a little afraid of what they had seen and heard. They had seen Ray hunched over his alto, blind to everything but the music, blowing something that was either profanity or prayer. They didn't understand, and were frightened because they didn't.

The silence needled Ray, slowly opening him up in scalding wounds. He lurched to the centre of the dais, still dazed and still on the hill alone, only now instead of nothing, there was poison, evil, staring hatred. He stared back at the evil and the hatred with equal hatred.

'Is that what you wanted? Is that what you were yelling for? Well, you got it. You got what you wanted. Do you know what you got? You got everything, heart, soul, guts, and bones. There's nothing else left. Do you understand? You bled me, sucked me dry. You asked for everything and you got it. Do you know what you got? You got the world's passion, the force of the hill I was on, where I saw nothing and everything and it was beautiful, you got the blood and feeling of me. Are you satisfied to have cut me up and drained me dry? Well there's no more. No, no, no more. You got what you wanted. You got everything.'

He hurled the saxophone at their damp, unreal faces and reeled through them to the door where he looked blindly back at them.

'You got everything,' he screamed. 'D'you hear? Everything, goddam it.'

No one noticed the negro, who cuddled his drum and sobbed quietly on to his sleeve.

LOTTE ZURNDORFER

Corner

The old man sits in his chair in a corner
Of the sitting room, his face towards the door.
For many months he has sat here, he is sore
With old age.

The sun at noon comes to his corner,
It is the first of the sun he sees. The door
Shines yellow ochre late in the afternoon before
His supper is laid.

He thinks he sits in a train in the corner
Seat. He travelled twice a day, from door to door
An hour or so each way, for forty years or more;
He cannot remember for whose sake.

He waits for death no more than from his corner
He waited for his station, gate or door.
The difference is, he has no key from the interior,
And he travels all day, but is not late.

He is perhaps in prison in the corner
Where he must sit, life's cell has grown so small; the door
Is double-locked, time and his body are the gaoler,
But he is quiet in his cage.

Time was he fretted like a tiger in a corner
When heart had hunger and the body power; some door
Balked every bound across the floor; though wide, a poor
Arena for his love and rage.

H. S. EVELING

The Anachronist

He wants to make the hour come
When those about him nod and smile,
He times his tapping on the drum
So each incipient movement mocks the style

Of trotting mummers on a Christian day:
It is his notion, then, to raise the heart
By such strange mimicry of the play
When God and Man and Beast had played a part.

But after all these years
He lacks the trappings of the time,
There was the singing movement of the spheres
And natural decor to complete the mime,

Whereas, at best, in this sad hour he hears
The little gilded clocks that whirr and chime.

JUDSON CREWS

Said Ever the Raisen Crane

Galleons were fleet on the sea in that day
the weather permitting
the sailors brave
but not enough to break their chains
to destroy their masters

This was a formal world, the weather permitting
no wave rose higher than ten feet tall
no fleet was larger than an hundred ships

The cannon was less than a germ
in an unborn mind
the time was a formal time
women wept in private chambers
men killed on the public square

But some there were who said that change would come
and they drank the drink as in any other day

I say now that change will come
let the drink strike me from out of the sky
this time too is a formal time
though women weep
on the public square
and men kill in private chambers

This time too is a formal time
where is the slave
brave in his conviction to slay his master
the chains no longer chafe on wrist or shank
in this formal time
let the drink strike from the sky
they only callous the soul

PHILIP LARKIN

Since we agreed to let the road between us
Fall to disuse,
And bricked our gates up, planted trees to screen us,
And turned all time's eroding agents loose,
Silence, and space, and strangers — our neglect
Has not had much effect.

Leaves drift unswept, perhaps: grass creeps unmown;
No other change.
So clear it stands, so little overgrown,
Walking that way tonight would not seem strange,
And still would be allowed. A little longer,
And time will be the stronger,

Drafting a world where no such road will run
From you to me;
To watch that world come up like a cold sun,
Rewarding others, is my liberty.
Not to prevent it is my will's fulfilment.
Willing it, my ailment.

THE LITERARY SITUATION — III

by Anthony Thwaite

'SITUATION' is the trouble: one can't pin the word down to cover just the movements and counter-movements we see, or pretend to see, in what is written from month to month. To mean anything worth saying, the word must spread out over the whole pattern of thinking, writing, and publishing in the country today; it must touch the fact that the editors of the last P.E.N. Anthology not only received about 10,000 poems but also published 101 of them; the fact that almost twenty-five per cent of those who answered the *Spectator* readership questionnaire gave their profession as 'writer'; the fact that, according to *Time and Tide,* the cash value (to the poet) of becoming a Poetry Book Society choice is 'in the region of £35.' This deadlock is the real situation: immense supply and negligible demand. I should imagine that the *Spectator's* twenty-five per cent is largely made up of people who write verse; not for a living (nobody can do that), but in a fairly regular and methodical way, before breakfast or after supper, subscribers to perhaps one other weekly, certainly regular Public Library readers of all the weeklies and established literary magazines, senders of manuscripts to them all, receivers of rejection-slips from them all. The poets, in fact, or the would-be-poets, or the have-been-poets, are the readers of poetry today. Everyone knows Dylan Thomas's remark about the magazine which had a circulation of 'seventeen poets and a woman who once met Kafka's aunt.' *Stand, Listen, Platform, Departure* — all of them do a good deal better than that. But there is still the fact that they are read, on the whole, by contributors or people who would like to be contributors. And so a 'literary reputation' can be made, within a circle of one or two thousand, quite easily: a dozen or so poems around the weeklies and the small literary magazines achieve it, and make it possible without any self-advertisement beyond the fact of being in print. Wherever a few poets meet — in a pub, at a N.B.L. or I.C.A. meeting, in someone's room — the names are traded back and forth, the horses are backed or the thumbs turned down, X meets Y for the first time, the circle widens a little and then closes again. The situation, in fact, concerns the seating-capacity (at best) of one of the larger West End cinemas.

This has nothing to do with 'cliques.' That word is overdone, or irrelevant, for no one with a spark of poetic fire is deliberately kept down or out; a glance at any batch of little magazines will show that, and will also show that many people without any spark at all get along quite nicely. Anyone can get published somewhere. The appalling, the frightening fact is that the literary community concerned is so small: and when a community is small, and especially when it is isolated, there is a chance of inbreeding. So we get the cretins and the mongols, the children who will squeak '*Outposts*' or '*TLS*' or 'Amis-Davie-Hartley-Larkin-Wain' for hours on end. Sooner or later their malady affects us all. We start saying the same things, using the same names, comparing our views and our fees, confusing the two. London, Oxford, Cambridge, and (I understand) Edinburgh are the places where it is most rife. I should not be surprised if there were traces of it in Dublin, Swansea, Reading, and Leeds; wherever there is a university, wherever there is a man with the

urge and the money to run a little magazine, wherever Mr Fraser's and Mr Hartley's reviews are read with whistles, groans, and curses, there is a touch of inbreeding or a patch of something nasty on the literary lung.

Yet how can it be otherwise? Great literature is produced by the great isolated figures. . . . *Y-es* — but then there was the Mermaid Tavern and the Lakes and the Cheshire Cheese as well. Or perhaps there has been a general failure of talent, which even the most drastic inbreeding couldn't worsen ; but with Thomas only recently dead, and with Eliot, Auden, Graves, Muir, Barker still alive (not to mention Pound and Stevens), such a failure doesn't seem *general.* And the fact remains that out of the mediocre ruck a few good poems still come, some of them written by young and promising people. Even such a mistake as *Springtime* couldn't hide the three or four buried there who wrote, and who go on writing, well ; all of them under thirty at that time.

But literary gregariousness or a failure of talent don't *produce* by themselves a huge supply and a tiny demand. The writer, and especially the poet, is a tenacious creature ; he will go on writing even if only his mother and a correspondent in Omaha read what he writes. He may not be happy in such a situation, for few of us are happy to leave everything to mother, Omaha, and posterity ; he wants the finality and judgment which print gives, and he wants sympathetic people to read him in print. Up to a point, the longer a writer goes on writing the harder he is to choke off ; a tender talent and a lack of single-mindedness may allow him to dry up at twenty or twenty-five — and that is what happens to most people who fill the school-magazine, *Isis* and *Granta.* But once a certain stage is passed — perhaps just a stage of sheer cussedness or habit — nothing can stop him, and he joins the *Spectator's* twenty-five per cent. It is not enough to tell him, as Mr Christopher Hassall did in the introduction to this year's P.E.N. Anthology, that he is 'in this real sense' part of the literary situation ; that by writing a poem and then having that poem rejected he is on the literary map. This might have been relevant to one of those names which crowd the lines of the *Dunciad,* for now each is a part of literary history, of vicarious interest as part of Pope's raw material. But the 'dull poet' is not even that today ; perhaps literary gossip will never again be dealt with on the grand scale. The bad poet sticks like a limpet to the rock of creation, and there is no laughter to budge him.

Some people might say that the solution would lie in the existence of one or two rigorously selective arbiters of taste and excellence, magazines which would have unimpeachable standards — that is, to be published by them would *mean* something, to attempt to be published would be to aim at something respectably high. But poetry is not like athletics ; there is no record which B attempts because A has conquered it. A poet doesn't thrive on competition. *Criterion* and *Horizon* were good, but they didn't make literature any better than it was. *The London Magazine* and *Encounter* are both what in another trade would be called 'quality' products ; and there is a general buzz about that they are only interested in 'names,' 'the gang,' for that reason. Yet if one of the day's seventy manuscripts looked like a winner, the magazine would put its money on, and its encouragement behind, it. Such a manuscript is one in a thousand. But there is always the easy way out for the rejected poet: *Poetry Macclesfield, Slipstream, Urge.* The manuscripts, fair, bad, and indifferent, are published in the end. The industry goes on, the endless stream of

'Ode and Elegy and Sonnet' pours from the poet to the magazine and back to the poet again. Every magazine hangs out the sign, 'Washing Taken In Here'; and we know what they mean. The whole 'situation,' with its apathy, its inbreeding, its frustration, may look very depressing. Yet it is always as well — and perhaps, in the end, it is cheering — to remember that even Dr Johnson could observe how small a quantity of real fiction there is in the world; and if by 'real' and 'fiction' we understand 'good' and 'creation,' the 'situation' may come into perspective.

THE ESSENTIAL STEPHEN SPENDER?

Collected Poems, Stephen Spender. (Faber, 15/-.)

THE popularity of Stephen Spender's earlier poems arose from their peculiar appeal to a certain cultured and humane readership. This poetry, contrary to common belief, volunteered no pat ideology, and it offered very little comfort. As poetry which was often deliberately 'of the moment,' concerned with comments on specific contemporary events, it was always vivid and arresting, but sometimes gauche and ill-considered. And yet, even in its confusions, it mirrored with moving accuracy the pre-war and wartime dilemmas of the sensitive mind; while in its rarer certainties and affirmations it achieved an eloquence and a power to move that was wholly appropriate to the size and importance of its themes.

The collected edition, however, conveys little of the excitement that is to be gained from reading individual volumes of Mr Spender's poems. Those books remain stimulating and vital because they show him as a poet who was exploring his personal and political themes with unusual forthrightness and uninhibited conviction. Some of the poems are poor, others could hardly last beyond their decade; but a book of them, as a whole, possessed qualities that have often blurred or vanished now that the poet has selected and revised his work. *The Still Centre* (1939), *Ruins and Visions* (1942) were important poetic documents that are still valuable and exciting because they are consciously and fruitfully bound up with the years in which they were written. They should be read, however, as they were first published, and in their entirety. For seventeen of the thirty-nine poems in the first and fourteen of the twenty-eight poems in the second are not reprinted in the Collected Poems. *The Edge of Being* (1949) has suffered even more: seventeen of its twenty-six poems are no longer with us. These include one that contains what is probably the finest sustained passage that Mr Spender has ever written — the last section of 'Returning to Vienna 1947.'

The sins of commission evident in some of Mr Spender's revisions are perhaps less than these sins of omission. Once one has got over the initial irritation at the extent of the changes (many of the poems contain few *un*changed lines) one concedes that a poet has a right to alter his poems, as long as it is not for the worse. But there are one or two cases which deserve special mention — again in order that the reader might think of turning to the original versions. In the poem, 'Thoughts during an Air Raid' (*The Still Centre*) the poet analyses the common feeling that others may easily be killed,

but never one's self. In the original version the power of the poem depended upon the frank and direct use of the pronouns 'I' and 'me.' The reader could immediately see himself in the poet's place, could see fully and painfully what he meant by

> 'The essential is
> That all the "I"s should remain separate
> . . . Then horror is postponed
> For everyone . . .'

In the new version, the pronoun 'one' has been submitted at almost every point where 'I' and 'me' were used previously. Thus, the lines

> 'there are many
> To whom my death would only be a name,
> One figure in a column.'

are now changed to

> 'there are many
> For whom one's loss would illustrate
> The "impersonal" use indeed.'

Wisdom (or cleverness) after the event has deprived the poem of point and directness. And since 'one' as a pronoun substitutes for both the other words, this contrived impersonality is monotonous also.

Similarly with the poem, 'The Air Raid across the Bay' (*Ruins and Visions*). This is a series of reflections on the images of the night sky, crossed with searchlight beams and throbbing with aircraft, and of the undisturbed land and seascape around, containing the

> 'elemental magic
> Of ripeness, which mocks
> The nails through flesh torn.'

It is a delicately observed poem, a number of sensitive images set down just as the poet saw them, vividly pictorial and authentic. But pondered upon and revised, it has lost all its immediacy. Two passages illustrate this. In the old version, the searchlights in the night sky

> 'slide triangles and parallels
> Of experimental theorems,
> Proving the hypothesis
> Of death, on wasted surfaces
> Of measureless blank distances.'

This has been altered to produce the vulgarity of

> 'Triangles, parallels, parallelograms,
> Experiment with hypotheses
> On the blackboard sky,
> Seeking that X
> Where the enemy is met.
> Two beams cross
> To chalk his cross.'

And, in the original poem, there followed

> ' But through their gliding light-streams
> An invisible ragged sound
> Moves, trailed by two distraught beams.
> A thudding falls from remote cones
> And pink sequins wink from a shot-silk screen.

Uncomfortably observant. But this has been polished and weakened into

> ' A sound, sounding ragged, unseen
> Is chased by two swords of light.
> A thud. An instant when the whole night gleams.
> Gold sequins shake out of a black-silk screen.'

Such examples should be noticed because the poet has there attempted to re-experience the vision of a particular moment, and has failed. They tell us more about Mr Spender as a poet than does the reprinting, sometimes almost unaltered, of the most famous and the most moving poems, ' Elementary School Classroom in a Slum,' ' The Double Shame,' ' Elegy for Margaret.' The virtue of much of his poetry lies in the absolute frankness with which it communicates the emotion felt in a particular situation. So such writing, unlike the more intellectual and ' worked-out ' poem, is hardly susceptible of revision in this manner.

But then the whole process of revision which Mr Spender has recently undertaken seems part of a growing uncertainty of moral conviction as much as of poetic diction and method. This goes much deeper than the mere abandonment of political creed deplored by the extreme left. It is part of the wider failure of the artist, and of the cultured intelligence in general, to evolve a humane and logical response to the problem of the atomic bomb. ' Nocturne,' which touches on this kind of question, is an eloquent poem but essentially a resigned one. Mr Spender would no doubt assert that he has gained a greater insight into what is morally and politically right since the thirties and forties. But this poem expresses nothing positive. The most important, the most moving of the poems written since 1950, it nevertheless denies any solution to the problem it considers. It is not the least disappointing aspect of this volume that Mr Spender's pilgrimage should have apparently ended at a point where he will no longer raise his influential, liberal, and humane pen to deny that affirmative and hopeful statements are no longer appropriate to poetry.

A. B.

LAWRENCE AND THE LAW

D. H. Lawrence: *Essays on Sex, Literature, and Censorship.* (Heinemann, 15/-.)

THIS is a collection of essays ranging over about twelve years. The shorter pieces, on subjects like 'Making Love to Music,' 'Cocksure Man and Hensure Women,' are lightweight Lawrence with the familiar flaws. Lively everywhere, they emit a note that is shrilly and unremittingly polemical. There's the same irritatingly fugal writing, nudging and fidgeting an idea, a kind of hypnotic parallelism, that enforces the central point about Lawrence's genius, its essentially religious nature, a Messiah whose disciples have mostly been Judas. The note, as I have said, is screwed up a little too shrilly and so, even in the major essays here, we are always stumbling across hasty flashes of generalisation. 'Why do we slur over the actual fact that Dante had a cosy bifurcated wife in his bed, and a family of lusty little Dantinos?' The answer is that we don't. But the jaunty premise swirls on to its corollary. The preacher has got you by the lapels; the tin roof is quivering with the passion and humour. This is better than Spurgeon or Robertson, even if it's not up to Donne or Newman. 'I call Dante's Commedia slightly dishonourable, with never a mention of the cosy bifurcated wife and kids.' For Lawrence, painfully alive at the centre of every word he wrote, the objectivity of the great poet remains quite incomprehensible. He remains quite ignorant, so it seems, of the way the mediaeval mind could order and relate idealised and day-by-day love. Were Lawrence passing a total judgment on that mediaeval view with a decent minimum of illustration, the case might be different. All this may seem to labour a small point and to miss the tone. But the bits I've quoted come from a polemic on the novel from Richardson, where such abdominal generalisations don't inspire confidence. Lawrence had many gifts, but historical perception was not always one of them. I think we are forced to agree with Mr Eliot, who complained that with all his intuitive genius, Lawrence simply didn't know enough.

But the total effect of the three large essays in this book: 'Introduction to his Paintings,' 'Pornography and Obscenity,' and 'A Propos of Lady Chatterley' is quite overwhelming. In substance the first of these is a masterful analysis of Cézanne. It shows clearly enough that art-criticism was one of Lawrence's buried talents.

All one's revulsion from the cruelty of tone and so forth in the two essays on sexual themes is forgotten in the extraordinary power of Lawrence's insight, his reverence for life, his deep sense of the mystery and wonder of human relationships. Far from the exponent of moral anarchy his detractors held him to be, he touched at many points the traditionally Christian conception of love as sacrament. Protestantism has blurred the creative function of fatherhood which Southern Catholicism still invests with its ancient sensual mystery. Lawrence's view of marriage approximates to this Latin Catholic view, an eternal relationship, here and in any other state man may experience and, if not found here and now, never to be found: In heaven there is neither marrying nor giving in marriage, no counterpart that has not been flesh of our flesh. Both predictive and traditional, Lawrence relates sex with the great rhythms of the seasons and the year, 'the crisis of the winter solstice,' 'the passion of

Easter.' He points us back to the orgiastic religions of the Near East, and forward to the mythography of Mr Graves. In another sentence he again reveals the fundamental nature of his responses, writing of the concrete relationship of the 'I and Thou' relationship in terms that recall Buber, where the act is in a sense less important than the recognition, the recognition of the other as a living person with the obligations of that mutual recognition. 'Knowing in terms of apartness, which is mental, rational, scientific, and knowing in terms of togetherness, which is religious and poetic.'

The essay on Lady Chatterley is intensely topical. Lawrence, I suppose, had more to put up with from the 'censor-morons' than most. Worried publishers forced him to tone down some of his more vivid passages; 'The Rainbow' was seized by the constabulary, and the same constabulary later raided the Warren Gallery, where Lawrence's pictures were being exhibited, and made off triumphantly with them. They also laid hands on some of Blake's drawings exhibited there, but desisted on being told that this painter had been dead for 100 years. Not so long since we've had another good 'grey' Home Secretary, a dull and diligent successor to 'Jix,' and another rash of inane prosecutions, spiced with the delicious gambollings of the Dogberries of Swindon. The police, rather behindhand when it comes to crime, can always be trusted to put up a decent show when it comes to vice. But vice after all is a matter not for the State, or even for detective-sergeants. Vice belongs to God, or at any rate to our private Gods or Devils.

Iain Fletcher

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